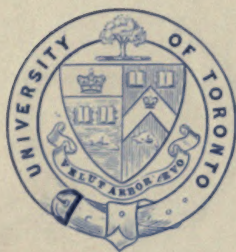



THE EARTH PASSION

ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE



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THE EARTH PASSION, BOUNDARY, AND
OTHER POEMS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

FROM THE ISLES

THE HAPPY PRINCESS, AND OTHER
POEMS

LF
P4472e

THE EARTH PASSION,
BOUNDARY, & OTHER POEMS
By ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE



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TO

W. H. L. B.

A. F. J.

H. C. J. R.

H. W. B.

C. J. H.

L. W.

R. W. C.

T. N. M.

L. W.

IN MEMORY OF

CAMBRIDGE DAYS AND NIGHTS

THE author wishes to express his gratitude to the editors of *Scribner's Magazine*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Smart Set*, and *The Century*, for courteous permission to reprint several of the shorter poems in this volume.

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THE EARTH PASSION

The senses are of the earth; the reason stands apart from them in contemplation.—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

The body and the soul are twain: but it hath not always been so. . . . This is because of the Fall of Man. . . . There shall be a new Paradise, if you believe me.—DEMITRIUS PHORUS.

I

A PRAYER AT THE SUMMER SOLSTICE

STRONG in its mood, the year's sunlighted noon
Of earth's wide solstice burns over the fields,
And in my brain and body.

Is it enough,
O Earth, that through the long flickering hours
Of sun and shade, where the green flame of grass
Trembles along the meadows—is it enough
That I, too, tremble with the passion of sun ?
Art thou content, branding and sealing me,
In the sight of mine own soul, as a thing of clay
Shaped from thy very fibres and subdued
To thy terrene desires ? Along my blood
Thy flame kindles ; yea, one who would be wingèd
With the white pinions of unbodied thought
Utterly sinks beneath the power of thee
And thy eternal passion. . . .

Do the years,
The unfulfilling years, bring no revolt
In thee against this mastery that sways
Thy being ?—Do the longings of thy Spring,
The fury of thy Summer, and the spent
Weariness of thy Autumn never lead thee
Into some haven of satiety ?

Earth may not answer ; and the gods are still ;
And silenter than all, the mastered soul
Wavers. For earth and gods and soul go by—
Though fleet or slow—like æoned suns, or stars,
Or like the moth's wing ; but one thing alone,
The eternal passion, is forever young—
A tide that throbs, beating like air around
Created form, and stirring over chaos.
Ah, does it shape, or does it crumble down
The universe ? . . .

Now swells the golden light
Born of an azure ocean, never foamed
Save by the fiery ship whose foam is cloud
Of curling silver ; magic light, swelling
As from the deeps of a terrestrial ocean
Melodies arise. Yet not for ear alone
The music trembles, but through every vein
It stirs, like breath on a reluctant lyre
Kindled by consonance with some far chords.
Whom shall it sing to ? Wherefore thus outpour
Wanderingly its music ? For the silence
Drinks, and is never sated of its strain.

Therefore I call upon ye, shining gods
Of earth and sunlight—if my soul must sing
In your antiphonal, captured in your clay—
Grant, ere the sunset, that some heart, listening,
Wander these meads along, and bring fulfilment
With burning lips, rapt soul, and eager arms,
And instinct clear to justify earth-passion.
Give me thy revelation ; mould my dust,
Thirsty with drought of body in the sun,
To beautiful flowers by thy secret dew ;

Or else sweep it in whirlwinds over space,
Strew out my dust into the infinite,
And free the spirit mastered of thy solstice.

II

SONG IN SEPTEMBER

Now is the quiet evening of the year.
The passionate blooming of the fields is done ;
Earth from her task of bearing is set free—
The soul of earth released—the straining hope
Of bud and fruit ruined, and now at peace.
As here I wander, in these Autumn valleys,
Watching the purple hazes on the hills,
Hearing the slow, soft falling of the leaves,
Loving the silence of these Autumn valleys—
I somehow know that now, of all the year,
Does earth cast off her gross material yoke—
Transcends the clay that forms her very heart,
And sends her soul in amethystine mists
Over these hills ; pouring her hopeless dreams
Of more-than-earthly fruitage in these leaves
Most gorgeous hued with death ; and when the sun
Touches the hilltops with its setting light
Of shadowy golden floods, earth's soul draws near
To him who wanders in these Autumn valleys.

The passion and the blooming find their close
Here ; and the fruitage here ; and, in the end,
Untroubled by these grievous needs, the spirit
Arises free and calm, and of itself

At last is master, sundered from its dust. . . .
Wherefore beyond all seasons do I love
This solemn Autumn.

O glory of the hills
Clothed with the dream-hues of the dying leaves!
O dreams that rise from out mine own deep breast,
Not less divine ! . . . Is, then, the dust's decay
The one road to the free life of the soul ?

III

THE WINTER SOLSTICE

Gods of the North ! Strong Gods, risen from dusk
And unto dusk departed—when the solstice
Returns, then ye return, druid and dark—
Phantoms among the dead and phantom days.
In the short twilights and the pageant hours
That quiver night-long under the cold stars,
Solemnly ye come, stalking the herds of dusk
Like slow gigantic hunters on the hills.
Yea, in the night mine ears have heard your foot-
steps. . . .
What far-off horn ? What spear athwart the blackness,
Meteor dim ? What quarry pants and flees
To shadowy agony among the vales ? . . .
To-night is the hunting chosen of the Gods—
Gods of the North, strong Gods—ordaining now
One last pursuit before the year is slain.

Loneliness deeper than the woven bands
Of silence over death is on the world,

Closed round with silence. The extinguished fires
Of earth have left a frozen bulk behind
That sucks the heart's warmth into its dead dust,
And the soul with it. The mechanic body
Remains, a brute shivering in the blank air.
The winter of the body draweth on,
Revealing, ere the final Winter falls,
Many a foretaste of the bitter end—
The sundering and the silence. Now is sundered
Earth from its soul; only remains to it
The gnawing fierceness of its icy pain,
Winds, and abandoned rivers stiff in death,
And its most horrible passions, wolf-like, waiting.

And as the earth is blossomless and void
With a vast horror, even so am I.
And beaten by the wings of the wild Winter,
The faint illusion of my Summer's pride—
That subtle fabric woven of its passion,
Its proud-hued glory in the body's lust—
Rends; and in barren nakedness the brute
To whom the spirit with a chain is joined
Shivers before the stern gaze of the soul.
And the soul sees the cowering flesh, ashamed,
Hating the brutish shape that snarls and quails
Beneath its glances, and the baser clay
Which it must see and scorn, but cannot change.

IV

A SONG IN MARCH

THERE is a thawing somewhere in the earth ;
I know it somehow ; even the icy air
Seems to remember Summer and the flowers.
Almost I might forget the winter night,
The sun that set in blood, the moon that rose
As ghost of a long-desolated world,
The piercing agony of relentless stars
Sown in the blackness like a thousand spears.
To-night the stars seem not so very far,
And over them the same wind seems to blow
That calls my soul to waken from its sleep.
The blood is stirring in my veins again,
Pouring its tide of dreams upon my heart
That was so late the Winter's.

Bitter days
Are those the Winter leads in grey-hued train.
It is not good that ever the soul should be
Dissevered from the body, as has been
Throughout the Winter. Save for icy touch,
Sharp on my numbèd senses, have I moved
Oblivious of this flesh, wherein the blood
Leaps with such sweetness in the Summertime.
I had almost forgot the trembling touch
Of summer morning scents in dewy woods,
The long aisles of the dawn. I had forgot
The stealing bodily rapture felt when winds
Come cooling through dim casements silently

To one who sees the wheeling summer stars
Beyond the darkness of that pulsing night.
All sweet earth-woven joys I had forgot ;
And only as a mind I dwelt in space,
Chafing my chains with idle bitterness.

Now with reviving touch, the lengthening days
Make me remember all I have put by.
Once more the body claims its rightful joy,
The pure and simple joy of the warmed earth,
That may not wisely ever be forgot.
Since we are bound in these strange bonds of clay,
He shall do well who seeks no fond release ;
But strives to join the warring sense and soul,
Not slave and master, but concording lords.

Wherefore lift up your voices, O ye winds.
Ye blossoms hidden somewhere in the earth,
Prepare your magic. And O dreams, mine own,
With soul and body joined in peace once more,
Awake, arise, for we shall see the Spring.

V

A MONODY IN APRIL

WERE I a painter I would paint these marshes
With the sad mist upon them : the low shore
Of palest green beyond the mirror water—
A green thread on the grey of lake and sky.
And then, touching the brush most delicately,
I would add the mystery of the cold white rain
That falls at moments. And I think one bird—

A heron, or a wild-duck from the north,
Should hover like a leaf along the sky.

Were I a painter !—and how many a time
When the world's beauty seemed too much to bear
In one small heart—how many a time have I
Longed for the colour-craft, the magic line ;
Cursed mine own art as blind, cold, of the brain,
Not of the soul nor of the pulsing heart.
Ah, for the pulse of music ! I could weave
Out of these marshes such a faint and strange
Melody for the viol that all who listened
Should silent grow, and think of twilight hours
And empty chambers fronting toward the sea. . . .

This earth to-day is like a silent maiden,
Burdened with some deep ecstasy, whose joy
Mingles with pain in so divine a web
She dares not speak, but moves in mystery.
She trembles ; and the sun is almost hers
At moments through the brightness of the rain.
She breathes, and knows some strange and lovely thing,
Some dream, before birth woven over her. . . .

Vague life is stirring ; and the impassioned winds
Seem almost melted from their vigorous freshness
By the soft fragrance that their wafture bears.
O breezes, do ye know some secret covert,
Some magic sanctuary of the hills
Where curls the incense and up-springs the fire—
The mystic incense and the pale green fire
Of flowering worship round the gods of Spring ?
I would go with you ; I would bow me there,
And there renew the immemorial rapture
Breathed on these lands. . . .

O hills ! O silent temple !
O living shrine ! Perhaps that keen delight,
That ecstasy of worship which the heart
Must pay at such an altar, would destroy
This fragile mortal frame with too intense
Sharp exaltation ; would transform and mould me
To what no longer should be known as I.
Yet would I go ; yet would I find the altar ;
Yet would I pour my spirit in that worship
Which from spent embers lights a new-born fire
Though I be wholly folded in its flame.

VI

HYMN IN JUNE

WE will go out to the light of the new moon
In early evening. We will go into the fields
When all the willow-trees are soft with evening,
And the night air is scented sweet with June.
For we are mad this night with June and youth,
And time goes back for us, and fauns steal out,
And naiads whisper from their sleeping streams.

Why have we filled our souls with poet-visions
If not that they may live in us to-night ?
You are Proserpina, and I a lover
Who in the later days stretches his arms
Down the dim starlight of the shadowy past
Toward you in yearning. . . . Dearest of all shades !
To-night no Styx shall part us, for I come !

Let us go up into the forest-heart,
Where June and you and I can be alone

In the cool sanctuary of the leaves.
One feels the need of sanctuary now—
Need of some shrine unto whose silent god
We may pour out the clamours of our hearts.
It is a true need, deeper than we know ;
And therefore come. We will go into the gates
Of the dim forest, and call upon our god.

Ay, youth is pagan, for it is so glad !
Not early youth (how sad we were, how doubting !),
But that which comes when the mind's will is set,
And puzzles seem less real and strength more sure.
Ah, let it pass, all but that we are young.
Would you recall philosophies this hour,
Or systems of the numbering of the stars ?
Enough that you are fair and I am strong,
And the stars wait to rush upon the dark
When the white moon shall sink behind the hills.

Life and the Mysteries wait on us to-night.
Nature is glad because of June and us.
In her secret coverts, in her listening places,
She would laugh of joy because we come to her.
Because we come, as came the Attic youths and maidens,
With boughs in their hands. Strew, strew the leaves
for her !
In our blood she calls, in the night-wind, in the stars ;
And of all the earth, only we know her voice.
We, the free, the dreaming, whose eyes see clear with
youth,
Whose hearts are pure to love her, whose ears are fresh
to hear.
Who knows but that to-night she mingles all her magic
Only that our children shall worship thus in June !

VII

A SONG IN MIDSUMMER

O MAIDENS in the meadow, have ye seen ?
O youths that roam the woods, have ye beheld Her ?
She dwells not in the city's straitened walls,
Nor in the market-place. Full of Her song
Are the river-valleys ; when the August sun
Falls like a golden veil, come forth with me,
And let us praise Her with uplifted voices
And bosoms full of singing.

Ye, O maidens
Beside the meadow ; and O youths who roam
The wood throughout the long sweet summer's day—
Ye, too, have known Love, even as I. She comes
Clear as the light and fresh as winds that, singing,
Blow cool from the wide bosom of some bay,
Strewn with green vineyard-isles in the Ægean.
None hath beheld Her ; (may we see the sun-lands,
The far-off purple lands beyond the sunset ?)
Nor any heard Her ; (is the tremulous music
Of dawn's antiphonal for mortal ear ?)
Yet has Her light and has Her singing filled us
Unutterably ; and the soul forgot the shadow ;
And the dim heart lifted its voice and sang :

‘ Summer of the heart, O stay Thy going !
Hearts are swift to fade ; and dust remains.
We have seen Thy roses come and tarry ;
Stay the sadness of their final going.

Is there anything more sweet than roses ?
Can all wisdom pay the price of faded
Blooms of summer ? Linger with our blooming,
For when Thou art gone, but dust remains.'

The aster, and the poppy, and all flowers
Golden and red and purple in the sun,
That spread the world in height of August's noon,
Were at our feet the day when thus we sang.
For Summer lingered then, half turning back,
As loath to leave the meadows and the streams.
Yet but a moment ; for she turned again,
And with slow silent footsteps did depart.
And on the hill-slopes grew the asters pale ;
And down the wind the poppies' gold was blown.
Yet as they went, beautifully beloved,
One thing remained :—that in the August meadow,
With Love and Summer upon either hand,
We, few and chosen, saw the spaces clear
Above the sunset, and the flame of flowers ;
Felt the warm earth, and the hushed afternoon
Full with a music we alone might hear.
We heard that breathless music ; in our spirits
Its tones are quivering, unsilenced yet ;
And, like dazed worshippers to whom the faces
Of the fair gods have suddenly appeared,
We may depart, and see no more that vision,
But on all hours some light of it shall shine.

A SONG OF EAST AND WEST

To
America

A SONG OF EAST AND WEST

To America

I

OUT of our streets a strange tale came to me
Of how a nation, glowing in young might,
Suddenly trembled, since from o'er that sea
Where sink the Day and Night
Strange aliens were coming to its shores—
Its shores long called the free—
And unknown peoples flocking at its doors
Filled it with terror lest its golden stores
Should at their mercy be.
And closing fast the gateways in its pride
My nation stood; and lo! I turned my eyes
To its unpeopled lands, empty and wide—
Its parching deserts that beneath the tide
Of labouring peoples might in fruitage rise,
Where now all blossom dies.

Into our streets I went; and passing there
I saw the heavy face, the matted hair,
The wild and sinister eyes of many a race.
From Baltic islands and from Ural hills,
From Polish plains and from Italian rills,
All here had come, and found abiding-place.
And one who moved these teeming throngs among,
A low-browed Russian, spake with savage tongue,
Lifting a brute-like visage shot with hate.
'Shall yellow men befoul our wonted haunt?

No ! Infidels ! They are too ignorant.
We would not see always the yellow face.
No ! dead alone shall they invade our gate. . . .'

II

Springing from Europe, westward like a flame
The high triumphant wave of thought has swept.
Across wide oceans, to new lands it came,
Changing, yet still the same,
To where the Western Sea its boundaries kept.
And there it tarried ; while beyond, there slept
Old nations 'mid their dreams—
Dreams wonderful and rich with golden store
Of buried ages. Now the young light streams
In eager leaping beams
Out to those lotus-waters where the East sleeps on its
shore.
Who shall bid stay, who hinder now that course
Which folds the whole world with its passionate flame,
Completing now the cycle to its source
More rich than when it came ?

Behold ! The East is red with flame
And incense of majestic thought.
Though Brahma be the sacred name,
Or Buddha Gaya he who taught,
What matter ?—since their faiths are fraught
With bright imperishable things—
Things which the whole world needs to take.
Two races mutual toll have brought ;
And wide the gate between them swings ;
And West clasps East, for the world's sake.

III

My thought drifts over sea to that low coast
Where temples rise amid the wooded hills.
I feel the peace that there the spirit fills ;
I know that something we have strangely lost
In our onmoving life.
I know that in our strong gigantic strife,
The clamour of our cities, and the strain
Of restless intellect, we have passed by
Peace. And a heavy pain
Weighs down my heart, viewing our destiny.

The lonely priest beside the Inland Sea
Knows not the fever of our restlessness. . . .
His soul inherits from antiquity
Some clearer sight of peace and loveliness.
Heirloom is his of beauty and of calm.
Oh, could we borrow half that saving balm
To still the fever of our whirl and stress !
The envoys of our faith go unto him :
Would that his envoys came to us in turn,
Bearing the light he has and we have not.
Would that we mingled in one common lot
What little each has won from out the dim
Twilight of Being, where rare beacons burn.

The ways of East are not the ways of West.
Yet when two seekers in a single quest
Meet at an evening halt, shall they not part
Between them what each one may count as gain :
The paths of peace, the anodyne of pain,

And the profoundest secrets of the heart ?
And shall not each from other win some light
To aid him on his journey through the night ?

The world is one ; and all its aims are one,
Though varying outward aspects they must wear.
That which thou callest fair
May foul appear to men beneath a different sun.
Yet still the same each final goal
And the deep-rooted longings of each soul.

Lo ! now the day of mingled life is come.
The high cathedral chimes, the temple drum,
The minster organ, the pagoda bells,
Unto each other shall no more be dumb.
And from deep-hidden wells
The secret life of parted races swells
To leap the accident of sundering foam.
No more is beauty prisoned in its home,
Nor truth confined within its native cells.
Over the earth one banner is unfurled
Of many races, who at last behold,
As mists of darkness part in dawn of gold,
A single quest for a united world.

BOUNDARY

A STUDY IN DESIRE

To the ambitious, whom neither the boon of life nor the beauty of the world suffice to content, it comes as penance that life with them is squandered, and that they possess neither the benefits nor the beauty of the world.—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

*'Ye shall seek me, and shall not reach me
Till the winepress be trod.'*

SWINBURNE.

PROLOGUE

DARK is my song's brief reasoning :
How, struggling up the paths of pain,
Desire meets chaos whence it came. . . .
Few ears shall hear the song I sing ;
And fewer still to it shall bring
Hearts rightly bent to understand
The paths I trace in that strange land,
Where the high searchings of the soul
Are lost in void and barren sand—
Where Beauty, Knowledge, Love—each goal—
Fades, and the mists unbroken roll.

Yet to that sacred sad-eyed few
Who know the pathway—who have trod
The seeking mountain, touched with dew
Of vanquished night, and the ever-new
Hope of the dawn—who on to God,
Love, Beauty, strain from the lower sod—
To these I sing. To these, who sought,
Beyond the curtains of the light,
Those rays no dawn however bright
Wore, and no moonrise ever brought ;
To these I sing, who have been taught
The silence of the hopeless night,
Where hearts that trust and dream the most
In ruin are most wholly lost.

To these I sing, yet not to wail
A lost cause, nor to warn them back
Utterly from the hillward track ;

But that, grown wise, they may take avail
Of life itself, ere the days wax pale ;
Not leave it wholly for the black
Unmeasured wastes, and dream afar
From earth and all earth's numbered hours ;
That they may seek no unreal star,
But know clear-eyed what things there are,
And what the scope of mortal powers.

To stand forth free ; to see the form
Hidden beneath the faulty clay ;
To find the beauty in the storm
That tears thy flower's bloom away ;
To hold in balance life so warm,
And visions keen and pale, that they
Together teach thee how to go
Along the path that has been set,
So that thou mayest neither forget
Stern fact, nor dreams that surge and flow :—
This is to know what man can know
How Beauty, Love, and God have met.

PART I

PRELUDE

*HERE sing I of the varied toil
Whereby man makes more wide, more sweet,
Life ; till earth cannot compass it.
And he forgets his narrow soil,
Springs forth to make the stars his spoil :—
And then turns back with hopeless feet.*

I

There speaketh a Merchant of Grain.

Great are the blessings of the Lord !
The year turns homeward with its yield,
And through the granaries of the field
The Autumn's yellow wealth is poured.

Earth is a house of gifts again.
And yea, even by my feeble hands
The gates are swung which through all lands
Set free the life-stream of the grain.

My argosies sail forth at morn,
Bearing to nations dwelling far
More potent freights than hosts of war—
The peaceful legions of the corn.

Throughout the world it shall be poured.
And ye who take the loving yield,
Thank Him who fills the harvest field.
Great are the bounties of the Lord !

II

There speaketh a Commander of Legions.

They surge again in turmoil as of battle.
Waking, I see them ; and in midmost night
They sleep not at mine eyelids. All the fires
That burnt old kingdoms—all the pomps at dawn
Of new-born empires—all the dooms and dreams
Of fate and destiny are round mine eyes,
Until I feel myself more strong than fate,
And grip my sword as sceptre in my hand !

Ah, well I know the world's great stream is deep,
And deep the course of nations, and that flood
Which men who deem it fixed call History.
Onset it has, as a resistless river.
No man can stay it ; yet one mastering man
Could make determinate its random flow—
Lay the set course—plan where the flood shall break
Into new channels he has digged for it. . . .

And so to-night, when the flood lies asleep,
My brain grows almost drunk with its own perfume.
Knowing to my touch these rising waves shall spring—
Shall tear the old embankments—shall leap forth
And whirl along the channels I have wrought,
And God in His high heaven shall smile on me
As one whose power is like unto His own—
As one whose hand is almost destiny.

III

There speaketh a Lawgiver.

First Chaos ; then the Act ; and then the Law :
Such was creation. In my mind again
Creation has been imaged. For I saw
Springing from wealth of earth a fearful strain
Of power contesting power, that would have hurled
All life into the seething press of force,
And broke the balanced rhythm of the world,
And spoiled the allotted channel of its course.

Justice is equilibrium of rights.
And to the fixing of its narrow ways
Has gone the labour of my sleepless nights,
The toil and strength and patience of my days.
Now, being old, the recompense will come
In seeing thrive the workings of my hand,
The warring forces brought in quiet home,
And order made established in the land.

—Order and precedent, the rocks of State,
On which alone can stand the far-seeing tower
Of Law, whose strength must be on earth as fate
To crush upheaving forces by stern power.
The law we give is not the Law of God,
Our justice not His justice ; yet its name
Shall be a sword, a refuge, and a rod,
Lest earth reel back to chaos whence it came.

IV

A Student speaketh.

Here lies it all—the mighty past
That shaped the present. To each source
I trace the channel of each force,
And the great meaning dawns at last.

Old faiths, laws, and philosophies,
Old conflicts, and old halting-places,
Emerge from the dim sea of faces
And stand revealed unto mine eyes.

Yet this one thing I may not know,
Though often pondered. Toward what goal
Do these upgathering billows roll—
To what fulfilment do they go?

V

There speaketh One of the Three Great Teachers of the World.

Would I had been a poet ! Would I had been
A man of dreams and not of actual life,
That I might seek for truth the absolute,
Not human truth, which never can be pure ;
And that I had not known necessity
To veil my little wisdom, teaching it
Fabulously cloaked—yea, in a form of lies !

—Dear God, forgive me that I doubt myself,
And in myself that essence of eternal
Which is as the body and the breath of Thee.
But I have struggled in the wastes so long
And might not seek the fountain. I must speak
Unto a human people—give them truth
Veiled, guarded for the weakness of their sight;
Since well I knew, not yet the time was here
For the real truth—nay, not till real man come
Out of the clay that now envelops him.

Man struggles on unto the great fulfilment.
The lesser falls; the higher shall endure;
And in the end, men talk in heaven with God.
This know I surely; and, knowing it, must shape
My laws of purity and worthy life,
Not for his solace who draws near the height,
But for the meanest groveller in the slime,
Lest he, made blind with glory, reel to ruin.
I may not say—Love woman as thou wilt,
For love is beautiful; I may not say—
Be free in thine own spirit, shun all law
Save that within. Yet to the erected man
All other course were but apostasy.

Happy were he who, being pure himself,
Spake only unto few who had, like him,
Come to their heritage. Ah, he could know
Absolute truth, and tell it unto them
With all its dominance, as I cannot.

VI

A Poet speaketh.

I will remain till my last line is writ,
The last dream dreamed, the last enchantment sung.
Though life is bitter, I will not turn from it
Until, as from ripe grapes, there shall be wrung
Into a vase the essence of my being ;
And when at length the final drop is pressed,
I will turn from life, not timorous nor fleeing,
But moving out to take my longed-for rest.

I was not born for joy, nor have I sought for it.
Each blessing fortune gave but raised me higher,
That I might scorn the ministers that brought it,
And see more clear the single starry fire—
My goal, the Absolute. Absolute Love,
Knowledge, and Beauty. Ah, since Faustus died,
No heart save mine did half so fiercely move
Along this path's eternal eventide.

My goal? I reached it not. . . . Now my sun-
setting
Begins to come, although it still is day ;
And I shall pass, far from the troubled fretting
Of over-earthly will. I do not pray
Nor curse nor thank what powers have made my being ;
Till the last drop is pressed, I rule, not they.
Yet this I hope, that when my soul is fleeing,
Their hands will store my vintage safe away.

PART II

PRELUDE

*HERE sing I those who turn toward God,
Whose love, growing greater through the years,
Would rend the veil His silence wears.
They, leaving myths of crown and rod,
Search heights of sky and depths of sod
For Him ; and cease, made blind with tears.*

I

A Child prayeth.

I kneel to Thee, dear God, to pray,
And thank Thee for this happy day.

I ask Thee, from Thy Throne above,
To watch o'er me and those I love ;

To keep me safe from wrong and harm,
And shield me with Thy loving arm ;

To plant in me true goodness' seed,
And let me do no evil deed ;

Until at last the time shall come
To go to Thee, Who art my home.

II

There speaketh a Very Old Man.

I question not Thy holy ways,
Nor do I doubt Thy wisdom's plan,
Whose love, beyond the love of man,
Shines like a light upon our days.

And in Thy Gospel I have read
How Thou wilt aid the soul in need ;
How Thou dost will that never seed
Of righteous man shall beg its bread.

I who was young have now grown old,
And all the flame of my desire
Has faded like a smothered fire,
And my long tale is almost told.

And all the tears that seared mine eyes,
And all the griefs that bowed my heart—
I doubt not that they were a part
Of Thy high-holy mysteries.

Mine eyes are blind to see Thy will ;
I only bow my head in trust
That Thou, Who makest soul and dust,
Hast made my path, and makest it still.

And when I die, I hope for word
That shall bring clear the wise intent.
What all the toil, the anguish meant,
Show Thou unto Thy servant, Lord !

III

A Player upon the Viol speaketh.

Had there been God, He had not set
Anguish of soul as gate alone
By which men rise above the sod :
To none save those whose eyes are wet
Can beauty's thrilling light be known ;
And this is sore. There is no God.

If there is God, He stands above
With fire and fury in His hands,
To scourge the world as with a rod.
Yet who could make must surely love ;
And who could love must understand ;—
These he does not. There is no God.

IV

There speaketh a Student of Strange Religions.

All faiths have done themselves a wrong
To make a dogma of their dreams,
To think Light compassed by few beams,
And hide even these in mists of song.

They have set up, not gods, but men,
Upon the high eternal throne ;
And later clearer eyes have known,
And cast them down to dust again.

That faith shall worthiest serve the Lord
Which sets no forms to cheat the mind,
No altar-smoke which maketh blind,
No written Book to hide the Word.

V

There speaketh a Philosopher.

I have searched in the high lone places,
In the light of the dawning morn,
In the smile of human faces,
In the whisper of growing corn,

In the dim wild words of sages,
In the storm with the lightning poured,
In the holiest ancient pages—
But I found not Him, the Lord.

How shall the lifted breaker
Conceive of the tide that shapes?
How shall the dream of the Maker
Know aught of the will that makes?

How shall the thought of the Mind
Take to itself swift feet,
Turn back, and seek, and find
The Spirit which fashioned it?

The stars and the song of them,
The purposes of the sod,
Far though they be from men,
They are not so far as God.

VI

A Poet speaketh.

I wait upon the silence of the hill,
And all around me is the dim night spread. . . .

Here stood of old the Aztec multitudes
In the warm darkness of the summer night,
Watching the silent courses of the stars
That this hour rounded out the cycle's end.
And as the whitening dawn thrilled through the
East

A mighty shout went up to the dim sky ;
And all the multitude hurled down the hill,
Down the long hill to shatter into dust,
The carven statues of their ancient gods.
Then looked they up into the paling sky,
And with one voice cried out unto the stars.

And now I stand here on the sacred hill
And see the broken idols at my feet.
And turning from them to the slow white dawn,
I know not unto whom to lift my voice
Save unto you, O Stars, that fade from sight
Even as I call upon your deathless names.

PART III

PRELUDE

*HERE sing I Art, which, wiser grown,
Sees beauties never dreamed before ;
Casts by the forms it wrought of yore,
And follows as its yearned own
A gleam along the darkness shewn :—
And cometh back to peace no more.*

I

A Sculptor speaketh.

Above the full, smooth curve of gold
Pearls crust like foam the swelling lip.
I think not Tamburlaine of old
From such a cup his wine might sip.

And see, the frieze around its side—
Bacchus and all his crew are there—
The fauns that chase, the nymphs that hide,
The vine, the rout, the streaming hair !

Yea, it is fair, this work of mine.
It goes to one far over sea—
A lord. And as he drinks his wine
He will grow glad and think of me.

II

There speaketh An Other Sculptor.

Blow out the candle. For I fain would sit
Here in the shadow by the firelight,
And watch the ashy logs a little while.

Methinks mine eyes are tired, and my hand
Has not the firmness it will have to-morrow
After the long deep rest. It was not wise
To try to work when all the light had gone.
And yet my chisel seemed to call to me.
Almost I felt that now at last my hand
Might carve in the cold stone that eager look
Lightening through my brain. . . .

I have worked somewhat long upon this head,
This Pan that makes my glory when 'tis done.
There's just one line—one look about the eyes—
One chisel-stroke to bring upon the lips
All the great meaning of the purple wine
And the high moments of divinity.
I know that look ; it haunts me even in sleep.
And yet to-night, as many times before,
I could not make it hover on his face.

I am a little weary, and my work
Seems not so sweet to me. I somehow know
I was not born to do so great a thing.
I had so vainly struggled, and so long ;
I cannot, cannot carry out my dreams. . . .

And yet—who knows ?—perhaps to-morrow morn
One stroke may bring the light into his eyes !

III

A Poet speaketh.

When all the heart's deep mood is told,
Then, like an undiscovered shore,
Out past the sunset's farthest gold
Remains a something more.

And we, who fain would ferry home
Its treasure from those trackless seas,
Return, bewildered of wide foam,
And awed with weight of silences.

We who had sailed with hope on fire
Out to those islands of the West
Turn back with baffled, sad desire;
And in the end, find silence best.

Our eager days, our starry nights,
Our hope, our singing—all is past.
We have beheld the far-shore lights,
And know them vain at last.

PART IV

PRELUDE

*HERE sing I love, not yet grown wise
To know the measure of its power :
Then, changing with each perfect hour,
A great dream flames within its eyes
Till it would seize the wind that flies,
And hold the perfume of the flower.*

I

A Shepherd singeth.

Now the Spring's begun to bloom,
And the flowers hide the hills.
Hark ! it's like a merry tune,
This white dashing of the rills !

This year Winter was not bad,
And it's all gone now in Spring.
Think'st thou not we might be glad,
Just as every other thing ?

I've a house upon the wold,
And a garden nice to see.
Dost thou think that it would hold
Such a pair as thee and me ?

I have always liked thy hair,
And thine eyes are sweetly grey. . . .
Love, we shall be happy there
Many a day and many a day.

II

There speaketh a Builder of Ships.

Love has done much for us : for me
It has been guide to teach a way
Unto the clearer light of day,
And show the highest things that be.

You taught me paths I had not known
Of worthiness, and how to face
Life and its struggles—how the race
Could best be borne, could best be won.

Ah dear, together we have met
Life cruel or kind, and stood the shock
Of many a tempest-whitened rock,
And felt the chilling spray blow wet.

And better thus than if alone
We had been battered by the flood.
Each dower of evil or of good
Was sweeter since we both have known.

III

There speaketh a Teacher of Youths.

How did I know I loved you? Why, I think
It first flashed clear the day when side by side
We wandered through the crowded gallery.
And coming to that little sketch of his—
The Master's, which so many years I loved
As with a passion of wonder—there you stopped,
And gazing, said: 'I would give all the rest—
All the great splendours of his perfect work
Which the world praises—canvas, stone, and bronze—
All, all, for this one little half-hour's sketch,
Which men pass by, being blind unto the Vision.'

It seemed that then I first began to love you.
For there are not many who would have understood.

IV

There speaketh One Who hath endured Great Suffering.

I love you not for your sweet grace,
Nor for your body's gleaming white,
Nor for the laugh of your delight,
Nor the dim sorrows of your face.

These things have others; these things prove
No barrier to set delays
To the harsh changes of the days.
And so for these I do not love.

But rather for some stranger thing
Less known of earth—some unguessed art
Of life and love, the mortal heart
Immortally transfiguring.

For I believe and hold my trust
That to the few there may be given
Vision of a serener heaven
Than glimmers through the general dust—

Some peace beyond the common strife ;
Some evanescent sense, but sure ;
Alone whose fountains are the pure,
Alone which touch the wells of life.

And so I love you—since your grace,
Your body's perfect moulded white,
Even your sorrows, your delight,
But hide the secret of your face.

V

A Poet speaketh.

The midnight blows its silver horn
Far off and slenderly,
And down the dusk an odour is borne,
And a dim moth flutters by.

Speak not. Let night fold round
Dumbly our seeking eyes.
Do you hear yet any drift of sound
Through the stars' pale harmonies ?

Nay. We have sought what earth cannot hold,
We who have loved too deep.
We would have followed the sunset's gold. . . .
Beloved, sleep, oh sleep !

Give me thy quivering hand once more.
Forget the old deep pain.
And take the gladness we knew of yore,
For the quest is all in vain.

Somewhere our souls unveiled may meet
Beyond the bourne of time,
But here we wander with blind, cruel feet,
And grope for a lost sweet rhyme.

And the midnight blows its silver horn
Far off and slenderly,
And down the dusk an odour is borne,
And a dim moth flutters by.

EPILOGUE

I

I REACH at last, even as have these,
The place where silence seemeth best.
I, too, depart from out the quest,
Who prayed for light on bended knees.

Ye poets, lovers, pilgrims—wrought
To hope too high, whose vision flies
Into the undiscovered skies—
Have ye, then, found the thing ye sought ?

I say to you the quest is vain.
And he who spends his eager soul
To win that more-than-earthly goal
Shall come in silence back again.

Beyond the limits of desire
There lies no land of final peace.
The questing soul finds no release ;
Nor ever fades the heart's wild fire ;

Nor past the uttermost mortal bound
Waits any garden for those feet
Which, finding life not wholly sweet,
Go tread the seeker's futile round.

Their hearts are drunk with poisoned wine
Of over-earthly hopes and fears.
They give their fleeting human years
In quest of something more divine.

And he whose hopes were high and pure,
(Too pure, too high) with fragile wings
Beating the bars of changeless things,
Shall learn defeat alone is sure.

II

I sing not for those meaner souls
Who never burned with hope too high ;
Who never saw, in sea or sky,
The vision of transcendent goals.

Little they need of warning words,
They who did never leave their sod
To strain toward Beauty, Love, and God—
Mere brothers of the voiceless herds.

Let them not dream my argument
Is for their ears, or that my strain
Is pretext that they turn again
To haven of their base content.

Nay, I am singing for those few
Touched with the fire of restless stars,
Striving to pass their prison-bars
With hope to seek for regions new.

For these I weave laborious rhyme,
And bring strange blossoms dewed with tears,
And garner harvest of past years
As heritage to future time.

III

But wherefore profits it to sing,
As I have sung, a musèd tale
Of hope that is of no avail,
Of toil that wins not anything?

Were it not better silently
To hide this dark and bitter song
Than to lift up amid the throng
The chant of life's last tragedy? . . .

Methinks that one, on a long road,
To those who follow, well may say—
'Turn, brother; this is not the way
That leads us home to our abode.'

Methinks even he shall labour well
Who proveth false one futile aim,
Who doth one snare aloud proclaim;
And to the coming lives doth tell—

‘ I know not be it far or near ;
 If over fields or sands or foam :
 I only know we seek one home ;
And that the pathway is not here.

‘ I know not where that path may be.
 But sometimes, in a pausing-hour
 Of my long quest, a sudden power
Brings knowledge, veiled ; and I may see

‘ Dimly, that we of mortal birth
 Shall find fulfilment of our days
 Not in the dreams of starry ways,
But somewhat closer to the earth ;

‘ Where, hoping little, asking less,
 We still may find some lovely bloom
 Sprung from the earthy heart of June
More worthy of our tenderness :

‘ And learn at last to take the yield
 Of what this mortal life may hold,
 Content with harvest, when the gold
Lies on the empty Autumn field ;

‘ Envy not the stars above,
 Whose home is space, whose life is fire ;
 But curbing infinite desire
With bonds of mortal toil and love.’

POEMS

KEATS

AN ELEGY

I

UNTO that place where thy spent form is laid
I came—when silence of the old-world flowers
Was over thee, and the trees' little shade
Was tremulous with April's golden hours.
And here, where the whole world seemed newly glad
And flushed with blossom of white feet of Spring,
A melancholy waited, hidden deep;
Here I, I only, lingered to be sad
With thought of what no budding year could bring,
Nor ever, with faint lovely echoing,
Stir thee, abandoned to the dusk of sleep.

II

Oh, earlier singer ! on whose paling brows
The dews of some unearthly morn are wet,
Surely the high gods harkened to thy vows—
Thy pure and reverent vows, and therewith set
Their incense smoke to circle thee and weave
Hushed secret gardens where should move thy feet,
And vaulted sanctuaries o'er thy head,
Wherein thou still with mortal heart must grieve,
But with immortal eyes might see the fleet
Forms that in heaven tread their mazes sweet,
And follow where the world's delight has fled.

III

The large pale fire of Autumn afternoons
Was open as a chamber unto thee.
And for thy sleep, the rising of round moons
Wove silence on the marge of a still sea
Whereon no eye may look save his alone
Who can surmount the piled barriers
That life and custom gather, hill on hill.
But who should bar thee from this sea, thine own ?
Upon its bosom have the domèd stars
Looked often down, and seen thy shadowy spars
Drifting ; and there dawn found thee drifting still. . . .

IV

We, too, have seen these fleeting midnight gleams,
And peered through chambers where the hid soul
weaves ;
Yet thou alone hadst power to tell thy dreams,
And scatter like the fall of Autumn leaves
Relics of pale magnificence, too fair
For work of joyous Nature unoppressed ;
Such only comes when in the cold grey heaven
Sweeps the immensity of Autumn air,
Awakening life from out its Summer rest,
Till, on the brink of death, with fire dressed,
In ruin and in splendour the leaves are driven.

V

In splendour and in ruin thou hast gone,
Singer whose like we shall not see again.
And even the heart most light takes on a tone
Of musing, mingled of strange ioy and pain.

Thy joy—too great for mortal life to hold—
The sunrise of that beauty thou hast made
To tremble round thee like a silver fire ;
Thy pain—the longing of a world grown old
For life wind-free as when Apollo's shade
Was musical upon each stream and glade,
Nor life nor love waned sick with spent desire.

VI

Yea, we are sick with thy deep weariness,
And for this evil thing there is no cure.
Though hope may come with subtle words to dress
Our troubled thought, yet only this is sure :
That life is dark and death is terrible,
And 'twixt the two, each finer soul is lost
In labyrinths of doubt and sorrowing.
And to be cold and steadfast, that is well ;
Yet who shall say what coarsening it cost,
What freezing on the bough, the rest being tossed
By blasts that are at least forbears of Spring?

VII

Not for thine eyes that sleep, nor yet for ours,
Shall Spring come up over the great green hill.
Yet have we share in moulding of its flowers.
The deep unrest no happy hour could still—
The trembling agony of life unsweet—
Of dreams—desires—gropings for hope unguessed
And more than mortal—these have driven far
Our whispering leaves beneath the great wind's feet.
Yet by the very strength of our unrest
No leaf shall come hereafter but is pressed
To strain more nobly toward the waiting stars.

VIII

This for the world ; that each wind-drifted soul
In fiery passion of its agony
Makes clear, to those who follow, some new goal.
But what, O pallid singer, what for thee ?
And what for us, in whom thy sickened breath
Lives out again its long laborious day
Of reconciling what can never meet :
Immortal longing in the house of Death ;
The free-winged soul, the wings of heavy clay ;
Hope of the dawn, and record of the day :—
What song's enchantment shall make these things
sweet ?

IX

None. Not thy vision nor our struggling dream.
Though we and thou, O greater brother, sing
Our hearts out in our music's trembling stream,
The world makes gain, but we not anything.
Above the tempest of unceasing pain
Avails it not at all to raise our cries,
Nor call our clamours in the ears of Time.
One refuge—yea, one only shall remain :
The solemn silence, the unshrinking eyes
That look from life unto the fairer skies
Toward which, upon our dust, the world shall climb.

Rome, 1905.

THE INTERVAL

NOTHING changes in a day :
Even Love, that is so fleet
When it lifts its flying feet,
Turns but gradually away.

Even Death, that comes so soon,
Lingers doubtful through the hours
Ere it covers up the flowers
With vague dusk and spectral moon.

. . .

When the lengthened days shall pass
Finally to where the world
From its slumber shall be hurled,
And Life arise from the dim mass,

Then those who watch the night turn grey
Shall know why, patient, still did brood
Our hearts that hoped, yet understood
That nothing changes in a day.

ON HAVING KNOWN AN ASTRONOMER

I THINK some constancy was his
Of worlds that move from ours apart,
Hushing with deeper harmonies
The rioting passions of the heart.

Though darkness brooded on the way
Wherein his measured course was run,
He dwelt in a serener day
With movements of a greater sun.

And we who knew him came to know
Some touch of that high silent grace
Which let no clouded tempest blow
The calming starlight from his face.

No intimate dream can give release
From life's enforced and narrow bars;
Yet was there in that bosom's peace
Something not sundered from his stars.

THE ORACLE

I LAY upon the summer grass.

A gold-haired, sunny child came by,
And looked at me, as loath to pass,
With questions in her lingering eye.

She stopped and wavered, then drew near,
(Ah! the pale gold around her head!)
And o'er my shoulder stooped to peer.
'Why do you read?' she said.

'I read a poet of old time,
Who sang through all his living hours—
Beauty of earth—the streams, the flowers—
And stars, more lovely than his rhyme.

'And now I read him, since men go
Forgetful of these sweetest things;
Since he and I love brooks that flow,
And dawns, and bees, and flash of wings.'

She stared at me with laughing look,
Then clasped her hands upon my knees:
'How strange to read it in a book!
I could have told you all of these!'

RALEIGH'S SONG

Love who singest before the dawn,
Give thy kisses unto me.
Love who singest when day is gone,
Bring thy sad tears unto me.
On earth below, in heaven above,
I would know all the ways of love.

Love who art sad, thine eyes are sweet ;
And, ah ! thy lips are lovely still.
Love who art glad, thy happy feet
May climb the path of heaven's hill.
But here on earth, or there above,
I would know all the ways of love.

THE VENDORS

THE rich have brought us gifts in lavish measure,
And gold, by which all things on earth are bought;
And bid us give them for their smiling pleasure
The sweetest songs our lonely dreams have wrought.

We gave our sweetest songs and took their payment,
Laughing the while upon the foolish throng;
Knowing a song is but as beggar's raiment
To all save those whose tears are in the song.

A VIKING SONG

COMRADES, when my time is near,
And mine eyes in death grow dark,
Reef the white sail o'er my bier,
Stay the billow-cleaving bark.

Then along the foaming side
Grimly, slowly, lower me
To the depths where I shall bide
Unto all eternity.

Let the white spray clasp me round,
Let the dark waves fold my head.
Restless in the fettered ground
I should lie, though stark and dead.

Let me sink to the still caves
Underneath the troubled foam,
Where soft gliding shadow-waves
Drift the Viking to the home

Where the souls of all the bold
Rovers of the ocean main
Sail beyond the sunset's gold—
Sail, and ever sail again.

Comrades, when the seas of ice
In the clear cold Northern night
Glow with hues of paradise,
The aurora's awful light,

And the twisting streamers whirled
Dance with ghostly changing glow,
And across the arctic world
Vague vast twilights come and go,

Think of me that ever bides
Underneath the restless sea,
Where the deep its secret hides
Unto all eternity.



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